

Derelict hall has new life

By ALLISON REDMAN

A DECISION to bulldoze and rebuild the Nethercote Community Hall may have been an easier option but restoration had its own benefits.

The hall, located at Nethercote, between Eden and Pambula on the south coast, was nearing derelict status when the local community decided it was a building that could be rescued.

Initial talks about restoring the hall were held in 1996 and president of the Nethercote Residents Association Paul Gersbach said work is now all but done.

"Nearly 12 months ago we had the final inspection by council and they've given us a temporary pass (to use the hall) subject to a further inspection," Mr Gersbach said. "Basically we are just finishing painting and smaller bits and pieces." Although the restoration process was finished nearly 12 months ago, the official re-opening was held off so it could coincide with the 99th anniversary of the original hall opening in October 1910.

Mr Gersbach said the opening is a fantastic moment for the community and is a culmination of their hard work. "I think because it's something the community will benefit from and they could see the progress they felt happy to give and be a part of it" he said.

It has been a lengthy process to restore the hall although Mr Gersbach said there was no set timeline for its completion. "We didn't have a set time that we thought it would be finished by. The major issue was funds. I don't think we even had a dollar figure set" he said. "We didn't have an idea of how much we needed. We just decided to keep fundraising until we had enough."

While talks about rebuilding started in 1996 it wasn't until 2004 that the development application (DA) got through Bega Valley Shire Council. Yet there was enough interest in the idea that fundraising work was well underway before the DA was passed. Early efforts were focussed on fundraising, with the community raising over \$60,000 towards the rebuilding through various events including trail horse rides, open gardens, auctions, markets and even a womanless beauty pageant. A government grant in 2007 added a further \$38,000 to the coffers, while additional support from Bega Valley Shire Council in particular the general halls committee saw the project receive \$1200 of funding on average each year for repairs and maintenance.

Community ready to celebrate

Every dollar was a welcome help to the project while volunteer labour was not only helpful but built community spirit. "Financially it was an absolutely enormous bonus. We had thousands of hours of free labour ... The spin off from that was there were guys there that I would not have met if I wasn't at the working bees," Mr Gersbach said.

"That has been a big bonding exercise, the working bees and fundraising activities".

Restoration started in 2004 and of the initial building the only original parts that were in good enough condition to reuse were a brick fireplace, the wall framing roof trusses and the timber floor. We wanted to retain the style and character (of the hall) which is probably why it took so long to get it restored," Mr Gersbach said. The modern facets are steel floor bearers and stumps, complete new electrical wiring, commercial quality kitchen flushing toilets and weatherboard profile Colorbond steel external wall cladding. A grand opening day was held on Saturday, October 24.



Before, DURING AND AFTER: Four stages of the building process for Nethercote Hall.